

NewsWatch

SMALL-FARM APPEAL: General manager Nicola Noble likes managing a small farm because she can connect with its animals and customers.



Calders favor direct route

By JENNIFER VINCENT

WILLIAM Calder might be 92, but he's still very much a part of the dairy business he started in 1946. However, now the reins have been relinquished to his son John, who has developed the full-circle business it is today.

Calder Dairy and Farm raises feed for cows, transports the milk to its dairy for processing, and then delivers dairy and other food products directly to the consumer's home.

Back in the '50s, delivering milk in glass bottles to homes was a way of business. Today, it's still business, but it's certainly not mainstream and that's OK with the Calderys, who

More about Calder Dairy and Farm

BOTH the farm and processing plant have a store on-site offering ice cream, candies, jellies, pickles and a full selection of dairy products.

Ice cream ingredients are shipped from the dairy back to the farm to be made into 37 different flavors.

Calder dairy products are sold to retailers such as Kroger, Zingerman's, Bushes, Whole Foods and several other outlets.

Milk is offered in white, strawberry and chocolate, and customers can request whole natural milk that is still pasteurized, but not homogenized, allowing the cream to come to the top.

Calder Dairy contracts with a local egg producer to offer additional products.

Key Points

- Calder Dairy and Farm offers home delivery to customers.
- It satisfies customers' desire to know where food comes from.
- The farm offers tours and helps educate consumers about milk.

like the direct connection with the customers and the old-fashioned way of doing things.

Most would assume the dairy came first and then the processing plant. Not so.

William bought property in Lincoln Park and then built a milk processing plant, buying milk from the Michigan Milk Producers Cooperative. Using bonus money from the Air Force, he bought the first delivery truck. It was John who later developed the farm as its main supplier of milk.

The farm's beginning

Raising four children, William and his now deceased wife, Velma, wanted a retreat from the city, a place to bring the kids during the summer and a home to retire to someday. After buying a 90-acre farm in Carleton in 1967, they were advised by neighbors to buy a cow or two to keep the weeds down.

A few Brown Swiss were added, which sparked John's interest in milking, leading to more cows. John would milk in the morning, bring the milk to the processing plant, go to school, milk after school and return to the plant.

The farm grew to about 20 cows when John, a first-generation farmer, graduated high school and was urged to further his education. He attended

the University of Michigan, but made the decision to return home after a fire destroyed the main barn.

"He was needed at home, and he loves the farm," explains Nicola Noble, who has been the farm's general manager for 14 years. John never finished his degree, but he has no regrets.

Today, the farm has 114 cows. John raises all his own feed on 550 acres, and the dairy and farm employ 53 full- and part-time employees. All the milk goes to Calder Dairy, as well as milk from 55 cows on Brian Reaume's farm nearby.

Calder Dairy processes about 250,000 pounds of milk a month and delivers to 1,500 homes on 17 routes in Monroe, Wayne, Oakland and Washtenaw counties.

"During the holidays, we're famous for our New England-style eggnog and chocolate milk," Noble says.

Home orders can be standing or change weekly. "It's all computerized, and we bill at the end of the month," Noble explains.

Wholesomeness is what customers of Calder Dairy



FATHER 'N' SON TEAM: William Calder (right) developed Calder Dairy and son John later developed the farm to supply the milk.

expect, and John says he delivers just that. "We deliver a premium product. We control all the cows' feed, have never used rBST, and the glass bottles keep it pure," he says. "Our customers tell us that our milk just tastes better. Part of that is because it's so fresh, and it's not mixed with milk from a lot of different farms.

"We use vat pasteurization instead of ultra-high pasteurization, which is heated at a lower temperature and for a longer time, and our milk comes from Jersey and Brown Swiss cows [in addition to Holsteins] that have a higher butter fat count."

Noble adds, "Our customers are interested in where their food comes from; they like the small farm and are willing to pay a premium for our products."

Farm hours

The farm is open 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. seven days a week to visitors free of charge; it offers tours for small and large groups.

"We had a school group of about 300 one time," Noble

adds. "We've had preschoolers to adults. We educate them on the circle life of milk. They can milk a cow; feed ducks, geese, goats and horses; and enjoy an ice cream cone. About 7,000 people a year take a tour."

There's also a burro, llama, peacocks, emus, tom turkeys and Texas longhorns.

The farm partners with youth who are interested in feeding, grooming, walking and practicing with cows to show at 4-H fairs. "We have 11 cows going to the fair this year," Noble says. "It allows kids that don't have the ability to have a cow on their property to get involved with 4-H and animals. We've been doing it for about 25 years."

Mike Score, a Michigan State University Extension educator specializing in value-added agriculture, has worked with John for a couple of years. "I've helped him with business plans, and we've had strategic discussions about his business purpose, goals, finances and areas that could be improved.

"John is a great entrepreneur, and is an open and progressive thinker. He's adapted his business and developed some unique and exciting arrangements with customers that are hard to replicate. And, he's not done; he's always looking for new ways to improve."

For more information about the dairy, visit www.calderdairy.com or call 734-654-2622.



SNACK TIME: Danielle Strang of Dearborn visited Calder Farm in June and enjoyed ice cream with daughters MacKenzie, 5, and Alyssa, 18 months.